SEMANTIC NOTES

NE. *baffle*

The NED., after discussing the possible influence of Fr. *beffler* 'deceive, mock or gull with faire words' (Cotgr.) and Fr. *baffouer* 'hoodwink, deceive, besmeare' (Cotgr.) as well as the Scotch *bauchle* 'treat contemptiously' on NE. *baffle*, comes to the conclusion that there is a confusion of two or possibly three stems in the word. This confusion is not one of phonetic form but one of the variety of meanings which apparently cannot be explained from any one of the above words. NE. *baffle* has the following meanings, the earliest dating from the 16th century (I give them as arranged by the NED.): 'disgrace, subject to public disgrace of infamy; vilify, run down; cheat, juggle, bewilder, confound, foil; hoodwink, gull, cheat, juggle, shuffle, quibble; bewilder, confuse, confound; frustrate, foil; struggle ineffectually, exert oneself in a futile manner.' The arrangement of the meanings here given is obviously an accommodation to the three assumed sources. But the two French sources are brought in apparently only to explain the meanings 'cheat, deceive.' Other meanings such as, 'bewilder, confound, confuse, frustrate, etc.' are left out of account and no explanation of them is attempted.

It is doubtful whether the French words have influenced NE. *baffle* in any way. Of the underlying meanings of these we have no trace in the English word. A similarity of phonetic form and the secondary meaning 'deceive' are hardly sufficient proof of influence.

We need not go outside of the NE. and the NE. dialects for an explanation of most of the meanings of NE. *baffle*. Scotch *bauchle* mentioned by Skeat and the NED. as furnishing some of the earliest meanings 'disgrace, vilify, etc.,' is probably the source of most of the meanings. According to Jamieson (Scotch Etym. Dict.) it has the following meanings: 'wrench, distort, put out of shape; treat contemptuously, vilify, *bauchle, bachle* 'shamble, move loosely on the hinder legs, walk as those who have flat soles, *sb.* whatsoever is treated with contempt or disregard; a mean, feeble creature; an awkward, clumsy person,'

bauch 'weak, tired out, exhausted.' Wright, NE. dialect Dict. gives *baffle* these meanings: 'confuse, perplex, worry, annoy; impede, obstruct, thwart, balk; twist irregularly, entangle; cheat, humbug, make a fool of; insult bully, tease; strike, beat In the supplement of his Dictionary Wright further adds: *baffle* 'confuse, discredit; flutter, beat the wings,' *boffled* 'confused, rendered stupid.' From a comparison of the above, it would appear that the underlying meaning of the word was a movement from side to side as in walking in a slovenly manner or with a shambling gait. This meaning of the word Jamieson calls attention to more particularly by citing a number of Scotch dialect words, all with the ending-*chle*, such as: *jauchle, scrauchle, shauchle, trauchle, trachle, wauchle, hauchle, hychle,* and with such meanings as: 'move from side to side in walking, like a young child; walk with a shuffling gait, as with trailing feet, as with feeble joints, etc.' The suffix seems to have the frequentative force of -*le* in NE. *shamble, wriggle, waddle, waggle, hobble, etc.*

Such meanings as 'twist, distort, etc.' in NE. *baffle* develop directly from 'move from side to side in walking.' There also develop: 'walk awkwardly, unsteadily, walk in a slovenly manner; be clumsy, stupid, confused, perplexed; confound, bewilder, etc.'

For similar meanings in other words compare the following: NE. dial. *hyter* 'walk with tottering steps; work in a weak, unskilful manner, *sb.* an act of working or walking; state of confusion; nonsense, weak, stupid person,' Scotch *hyter* 'confusion, ruin, nonsense, act of walking with a weak tottering step, or working in a weak, confused manner; weak, stupid person.'

From the meanings 'perplex, bewilder, confuse' develop 'deceive, humbug, etc.' in *baffle* just as they do, for example, in the following: NE. *flummock, flommock*' go about in an untidy, slovenly way; trail the dress in a slovenly manner, *sb.* hurry, confusion, '*flummox* 'bewilder, perplex, puzzle, astound; overcome in an argument, non-plus, confound, baffle; cheat, deceive, 'NE. dial. *flummer* 'state of agitation, confusion,' Norw. dial. *fluma, floma*' tumble or flounder about as a horse in the mire.' Cf. Wood, Hesperia, Ergänz. I, §20.

Since, therefore, Fr. *beffler* and *baffouer* have been brought in merely to explain the meaning 'deceive' their connection

becomes superfluous, if this meaning can be explained from the
NE. dialects.

As for other influences on NE. *baffle*, it is very likely that
such meanings as 'strike, beat, insult, bully,' in the NE. dialect
word are influenced by NE. *baff* 'strike, beat' connected with
Norm. Fr. *baffer* 'slap in the face,' Prov. *bafa* 'scoff,' which may
be borrowed from MHG. *beffen* 'scold.' It is even likely that
Fr. *beffler* and *baffouer* may be from the same word, a connection
which Skeat suggests.

NE. *gum*

For this word the Century Dictionary records the following
meanings: 'smear with gum, clog by gum or gumlike substance;
play a trick upon, humbug, hoodwink (U. S. slang).' For the
last three meanings it gives this explanation: "said to be from
the fact that opossums and racoons often elude hunters and dogs
by hiding in the thick foliage of gum trees." I have been unable
to trace the origin of this explanation, but the uses of the word
given by the Cent. Dict. and the NED. do not in the least indi-
cate any such origin. The explanation, in fact, smacks of
'folk-etymology.'

The quotations are:

> "You can't gum me, I tell you now,
> An' so you needn't try." Lowell, *Biglow Papers, Ist series*
> <div align="right">(Cent. Dict., NED.)</div>

> "I began to think he was quizzing me—'gumming' is the proper Trans-
> atlantic colloquialism." Sala, *Tw. Round the Clock* (1861).
> <div align="right">(NED.)</div>

This much is clear about the word. It is used here in the
sense of 'deceive,' and its use with this meaning is confined to
the United States.

Two very natural semantic developments of the meaning
'deceive' in this word are possible. In the first place, if we take
ME. *gomme* < Fr. *gomme* < Lat. *gummi* as the phonetic ante-
cedents, 'deceive' develops from 'smear with gum, clog or stick
by a gumlike substance' directly, just as in NE. *stick* 'smear
with a viscuous or glutinous matter; impose upon, cheat
(slang),' and numerous other words in the Germanic dialects
especially.

Secondly, it may have developed (and this seems still more
likely) from E. Dial. *gum* 'impertinent talk, chatter, 'jaw,'

insolent talk; deceitful speech,' *gummy* 'deceitful, boastful.'
Compare the following quotations from the NED.: "Come, let
us have no more of your gum." Grose, *Dict. Vulg. Tongue.*
"Come, none of your gum—now you are but an underling"
R. B. Peake, *Americans Abroad.*

The use of this noun as a verb, a very common occurrence
in slang, gives us a meaning parallel to the use in the quotations
above. Note especially the quotation from Sala defining 'gum-
ming' as 'quizzing' by which he means 'bantering talk.' Here,
then, the idea 'deceive' develops from the meaning of the sub-
stantive *gum* 'flesh of the jaws': ME. *gome,* OE. *gōma* 'jaws,
palate' just as, for example, the following: E. dial. *gag* 'ridicule,
quiz; hoax, deceive,' NE. *gag*' impose upon, ply with talk,
'stuff,' deceive': OE. *gagul,* MDu. *gaghel* 'palatum, caelum oris.'

Now it is possible that the word may have been used by
hunters of the opossum in the meaning 'deceive,' but it is not
probable that he originated the meaning 'deceive' as that could
easily have been current.

NHG. *belemmern*

Kluge (Etym. Wb. 9, 45.) regards NHG. *belemmern* 'be-
trügen' as of Low German origin, derived from the comparative
of Germ. **lam-* in NHG. *lahm,* etc., and compares MLG.
belemmern 'verleumden, belästigen' without any further explana-
tion of or investigation into the meanings of the word in the
other German dialects. Evidently he erroneously believes that
'betrügen' develops from 'hindern, belästigen.' Weigand
(DWb., 199) calls attention to the prevalent meaning in the
High German, viz. 'beschmutzen,' and surmises correctly that
'betrügen' develops from this. But he is puzzled by the appar-
ently unrelated meanings of the MLG. and MDu. forms.

The word appears in the various NHG. dialects as follows:
Early NHG. *belemmern, belampern, belemmeln* 'bedrecken,
sordidare,' NHG. *belemmern* 'sich beschmutzen, durch kleine
Kniffe betrügen, übers Ohr hauen,' Sax. *belämmern, belämpern*'
'einen etwas einreden, ihn herumkriegen; betrügen,' *belemmern*
'besudeln, belasten, hintergehen,' Westph. *belämmern* 'be-
schmutzen; hintergehen, überlisten, übervorteilen, betrügen,
'Pruss. *belämmern* 'besudeln, verunreinigen, übervorteilen,
betrügen,' KurHess. *belemmern, belammeln* 'beschmutzen;

betrügen, hintergehen,' *lammel* 'der beschmutzte untere Rand des Weiberrockes,' *belammeln* 'den Rock am unteren Rande beschmutzen.'

The meanings of the NHG. word clearly indicate the semantic development 'befoul: deceive,' a common development in the German dialects. MLG. *belemmern,* MDu. *belemmeren,*' 'hindern, hemmen,' EFris. *lemmern* hindern, hemmen, aufhalten,' *belemmern* zum Stehen bringen; aufhalten, hemmen hindern, lähmen; beschweren, belasten' do not develop the meaning 'deceive' at all and are unrelated semantically. These forms are explained by Franck (Etym. Wb.) as coming from the stem **lam-* in NHG. *lahm,* OHG. *bilemen* 'lähmen,' MLG. *lemmen,* MDu. *lemen* 'lähmen, lahm machen,' etc. But this connection does not satisfactorily explain the meanings of the NHG. words.

These belong to another base, the Germ. **limp- *lamp-* 'hang down, hang loosely.' Compare the following words from this base: NE. *limp* 'walk lamely, *adj.* flaccid, pliant, hanging down,' MHG. *lampen* 'welk niederhängen,' *limpfen* 'hinken,. Swiss *lampe* 'Wamme, herabhängender Lappen': Skt. *lámbate* 'hängt herab,' Lat. *limbus* 'Besatz am, Kleide.' Cf. Fick, Wb. III,[4] 363.

The meaning 'soil, befoul' in NHG. *belemmern* comes from a form like Hess. *lammel* 'der beschmutzte untere Rand des Weiberrockes,' i.e. 'the part of the dress hanging down and therefore soiled,' *belammeln* 'den Rock am unterem Rande beschmutzen,' early NHG. *belampern, belemmeln* 'sordidare.'

Note the same semantic development in Als. *hammel* 'der beschmutzte nasse Saum eines Frauenrockes; unreinliche, dicke, böse Frauensperson,' *hammeln* 'sich beschmutzen,' Lothr. *hammelen* 'den unteren Rand der Kleider beschmutzen,' KurHess. *behammeln* 'beschmutzen; betrügen.'

NFris. *bislanterje* 'onder het eten zich bemorsen; bekladden, een smet aanwrijven; bedriegen, soil in eating; besmear, stain, deceive,' EFris. *slunteren* 'schlottern, schlaff, lose, u. unordentlich hängen,' *slunte* 'unreinliche Person.'

It is probable that Kluge and Franck are right regarding the origin of the Low German and Dutch forms. We have here a case of different stems **limp-, *lamp-,* and **lam-, *lōm-,* developing synonymous meanings. Compare the meanings given for

limp-, **lamp-* above with the following from the stem **lam-*
*lōm-: MHG. OHG. *lam* 'gliederschwach, lahm,' NE. *lame,*
ON. *lemja* 'hindern,' OHG., MHG. *lemen*, 'lähmen,' EFris.,
lōm 'gelähmt, hinkend, matt,' Du. *loom* 'lahm, träge, faul,
langsam,' MHG. *luomen* 'matt, schlaff sein od. werden.'

Du. *lorrendraaier*

An attempt has been made by Falk-Torp (Etym. Wb.,
665) to explain this Dutch word from which the Dan. *luren-
dreier* was borrowed. The Dutch word has the meanings
'smuggler, deceiver' and is used today principally among sailors
speaking the Low German and Scandinavian dialects. Falk-
Torp derive the first part of the compound from Du. *loer* 'Lump,
Tölpel' which is identical with Du. *luur* 'Windel,' OHG. *lūdara,
lodera* ibid., OS. *lodara* 'Fetzen,' found also in the shorter form in
OHG. *lodo, ludo* 'grobes Wollenzeug,' NHG. *loden*, etc., from a
Germ. base **lub-* 'hang down loosely.'

The semantic connection between these and the compound
is arrived at in the following ingenious way. There is a Dutch
expression *iemand een loer draaien* corresponding to NHG.
einem eine Nase drehen 'deceive,' as well as an older NHG.
expression *einem ein Lödlein eintragen* also meaning 'deceive,'
an expression referring to the dishonest weaver who weaves
poor wool (*Lödlein* is diminutive of NHG. *Loden*, cf. above)
into cloth. In the Low German the word corresponding to Du.
loer has the forms *lurde, lorde, lurre* 'Fetzen, Sorrgarn aus
altem Tauwerk' with the additional meaning 'verfälschtes
Tauwerk' from which are supposed to have developed 'Lüge,
Erfindung, falscher Pass, falsches Dokument, 'which we find in
LG. *lurrendreier* 'einer, der mit falschem Pass oder falscher
Flagge fährt; Betrüger.' Starting with the expression *iem.
een loer draaien, lorrendraaier* would apparently, according to
this explanation, have the following semantic development:
'one who mixes (twists) shoddy wool into cloth (in weaving),
adulterater, falsifier; one who goes with a false pass or under a
false flag: smuggler, deceiver.'

The compound appears in verb as well as noun form. Com-
pare the following: Du. *lorrendraaier* 'smokkelaar, schipper van
een smokkelvaartuig; schip, voor den sluikhandel gebezigd;
bedrieger, misleider, smuggler, the skipper of a smuggler (ship);

a ship used in the smuggling trade; cheat, deceiver,' *lorren-draaien* 'sluikhandel drijven, misleiden, bedriegen, carry on a smuggling trade, deceive,' EFris. *lurendreier, lurrendreier* 'ein Mensch, der andere Leute durch allerhand Kniffe u. Pfiffe hinters Licht führt, Betrüger, Schurke,' Dan. *lurendreier* 'betrügerische u. listige Person, Duckmäuser, Leisetreter,' Swed. *lurendrägere* 'Schleichhändler.' It will be seen from a comparison of these words that the idea common to all is that of some furtive, stealthy, surreptitious action, such as is practiced by the smuggler. But such an idea is not in evidence in the semantic explanation of Falk-Torp, for to 'go with a false pass' does not imply 'going surreptitiously'; in fact, the implication is rather the opposite of a secret, stealthy action.

An investigation of the possible sources of our word is somewhat confusing. We have, for example, the following words: Du. *loer, lor, leur, luier* and *luur* all meaning 'cloth, rag, patch, worthless article, etc.' besides a variety of other meanings from other stems which must be kept distinct from these. The above words may all represent a Germ. base **lup-* 'hang down loosely' as accepted by Falk-Torp, since the different dialect usages of the word account for the variety of spellings. (Cf. Franck, *Etym. Wb.* s. v. *leur, luier, lor*). Various verbs have developed from this stem, of which let us note especially the following: MDu. (Kil.) *leuren, loren* 'trekken, traag handelen, drag, act slowly, lazily' (Franck, s.v. *lurken*), MDu. *loren, lorren* 'betrügen, pfuschen, heimlichen u. unerlaubten Handel treiben,' Du. *leuren* 'einen Klein- od. Hökerhandel od. auch einen Schleichhandel betreiben,' *lorren* 'betrügen, anführen,' Antwp. *lörren* smokkelen, heimlijk, diefachtig wegdragen, smuggle, carry off secretly, stealthily' (Dornkaat Koolman, *Wb. d. OstFries. Spr.*). The *Woordenboek d. nederlandsch Taal* (s.v. *leuren*) gives these meanings for Du. *leuren*: 1. 'venten, carry on a trade; 2. lappen knoeirrig herstellen, knoeien, onhandig met iets omgaan, bedrieglijk handelen, bedriegen, patch, bungle, botch, handle awkwardly, act deceptively, deceive; 3. sleuren, drag.' A comparison of MDu. *leuren, loren, lorren*, and Du. and Du. dial. *leuren, lorren, lörren* shows these to be probable variants of the same stem. The semantic development is clear and can be paralleled by many words in the German dialects. Such words show a semantic development analogous to the following:

'move back and forth, work in a careless manner; dawdle, fritter away time; botch, bungle, be awkward, slovenly, trifling, deceptive; do something in a surreptitious, stealthy manner: deceive.' With the ideas botch, bungle, be awkward, slovenly are associated such meanings as 'hang loosely,' or 'a piece of cloth, rag, patch, etc.' Conversely, a word meaning 'a rag, patch, a worthless piece of cloth, etc.' may develop verb ideas such as 'work carelessly, botch, etc.' Compare: MHG. *blez* 'Lappen, Flicken, Fetzen,' Swiss *bletzen* 'flicken, pfuschen, durchprügeln, p. part. angeführt, betrogen,' *anbletzen* 'anlügen, zum besten haben,' Als. *bletzen* mit einen Lappen besetzen, flicken; hintergehen, betrügen.'

Whatever the origin of Du. *leuren* may be, this development of meaning in the word seems clear: 'drag, act lazily, awkwardly; botch, bungle, be trifling, stealthily deceptive: deceive.' Note the similar development in: EFris. *fudden* 'unordentlich und nachlässig arbeiten, pfuschen; heimlich beiseite schaffen; *fudde* 'Lappen, Fetzen, NE. *fode* 'waste time, delay, postpone a matter by evasive excuses; beguile,' Westph. *füdeln* 'betrügen,' Als. *fudlen* 'eine Arbeit langsam verrichten, oberflächlich arbeiten.'

Antwp., WFlem., SEFlem. *foefelen* 'haastig en ruw, slordig iets bijeendoen; heimlijk verbergen, noffelen; bedrieglijk te werk gaan; brodelen, knoeien, put together in a hasty, clumsy slovenly manner; hide secretly, shuffle, act deceptively; botch, bungle, 'Antwp., WFlem. Zaan. *foefen* 'bedektelijk bedriegen, foppen,' *befoefelen* 'heimlijk bedriegen,' WFlem. *foef* 'vod, lap, rag, piece of cloth.' But Du. *leuren* also means 'carry on a trade.' The association of this meaning with the foregoing idea of a stealthy action developed 'carry on a trade stealthily, secretly: smuggle.'

The word *lorrendraaier*, then, developing from the expression *iem. een loer draaien* 'deceive' gets the meaning 'smuggler, etc.' not through the LG. *lurde, lorde, lurre* 'verfälschtes Tauwerk,' etc., but from the meanings of the related Du. *leuren, lorren.* (Falk-Torp regard *lorren* as developing 'deceive' through the meanings 'verfälschtes Tauwerk, etc.' But compare the semantic explanation above.) The word originally probably meant 'deceiver' and was formed just as, for example, NHG. *Nasendreher* 'deceiver' might be formed from *einem eine Nase drehen* 'deceive,' but that would not explain the meaning

'smuggler.' The explanation for this must be sought for in Du. *leuren, lorren* which also meant 'deceive,' but which developed this meaning in an entirely different way.

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